



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Optimising Content in the Distribution of Trade and Agro-Industrial Enterprises through Digital Content Marketing

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### ABSTRACT

The digital transformation of the business environment and the paradigm shift from a seller's market to a buyer's market have contributed to the emergence and rapid development of digital content marketing. The article discusses the topic of digital content marketing in general and in particular for the field of distribution trade and agribusiness marketing and its importance for successful online business promotion. This study aims to conceptualise digital content marketing (DCM) in B2B markets and pinpoint contingencies that influence its performance. The study employs the following methods: dialectic and historical, method of generalisation and grouping, analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, systemic and institutional approaches, and modelling. Logistic and intuitive methods and content analysis were used to determine the features, problems, and trends in developing digital content marketing and value co-creation. Elements of a systematic review and grounded theory were applied when working with literature sources. An attempt has been made to systematise the differences and problem areas of digital content marketing in the B2B sector and "traditional" B2C content marketing. Digital marketing is shown as a strategic approach to realising value co-creation opportunities. Value co-creation (VCC) is an example of how group creativity may promote development, loyalty, and mutual success – vitally crucial in business-to-business interactions. This approach is claimed to be especially important for industries such as agriculture, offering synergetic instruments.

## INTRODUCTION

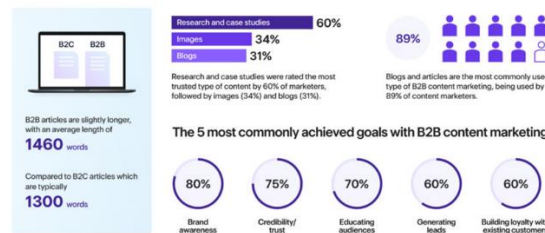
Digitalisation and increased access to online information have made it easier for buyers to search, compare and order deals, thus changing their purchasing processes and overall marketing landscape. In particular, these buyers rely more on online information. Thus, influencing modern purchasing processes requires digital resources that effectively help buyers move forward in the purchasing process on their terms. This paradigmatic shift from firm-centric to customer-centric selling to

helping the customer, in turn, triggered the emergence of digital content marketing (Arynova et al., 2024).

Digital content is a format that involves creating and sharing published content to attract customers. It began to be used to spread information about the brand and strengthen its reputation. The type of content published may vary blog posts, case studies, white papers, videos, photographs, or articles. However, digital content is not simply text or commentary that a company publishes for consumers. Content should be exciting and interactive, and an essential aspect of the content developed is providing opportunities for customers to interact and offer feedback across various channels in the sales funnel (Matyushenko et al., 2022; Potwora et al., 2023; Prokopenko & Omelyanenko, 2018; Prokopenko et al., 2022).

Today, digital content’s importance in commerce is especially significant since it allows for promoting products, organising advertising campaigns, and forming and implementing the promotion of an organisation’s brand (Chunikhina et al., 2023). At first glance, it may seem that the central area of application of digital content marketing is the B2C sector, but this is different. The popularity of content marketing is steadily growing, gaining increasingly more recognition among B2B marketers. The size of investments is increasing, as is the number of channels for distributing content. This is because this marketing technique provides a remarkable return on investment and is trusted by the target audience. According to the study results, about 30% of the marketing budget of the B2B sector is concentrated on content marketing. About 93% of business sector participants use this format, and 42% find it practical or effective (Merlette, 2021).

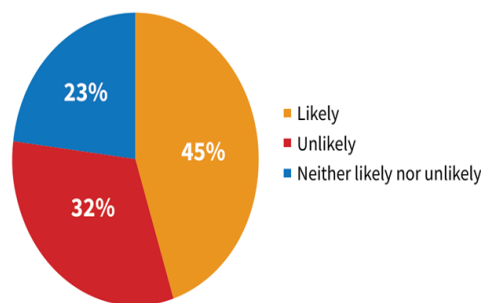
Experts provide interesting statistics concerning B2B digital content marketing (see Figure 1 below).



**Figure 1: B2B digital content marketing tools and effectiveness**

Source: (Hall, 2020)

According to the 14th Annual Content Marketing Survey conducted by the Content Marketing Institute, approximately 50% of B2B marketers anticipate investment in additional content management technology within 2024 (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Intentions to invest in additional content management technology in 2024**

Source: (Stahl, 2023)

The primary purpose of content marketing is not sales but rather creating a solid connection with actual and potential customers (Bashynska et al., 2019; Bashynska et al., 2022). By providing relevant and reliable information without the pressure to purchase products and services, this marketing format helps build brand trust much faster and more effectively than more direct methods, which many find intrusive (Nesterchuk et al., 2022). Customers with access to valuable and exciting information will trust the source more, as they are confident in its excellent knowledge and, very importantly, impartiality (since there is no prominent call to buy) (Hall, 2020).

This content marketing feature allows it to be used effectively in the “traditional” sphere of digital content marketing for commerce companies and in a specific industry, agribusiness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is a strategic marketing approach that aims to draw in and acquire a precisely defined target audience by producing and disseminating relevant, valuable, and consistent content, ultimately converting this audience into lucrative clients (Bossler et al., 2023). A different definition of content marketing is producing material intended to raise awareness of a business by drawing in the target market and others, appealing to the target market, connecting with them, and generating quantifiable outcomes through their mobilisation (Pimienta, 2021). One of the most adaptable tools in the digital marketing toolbox is content marketing, which can be designed to influence every point of the sales funnel and take on a wide range of topics and styles (Kisiołek et al., 2022; Nizhiaieva et al., 2022). Crucially, advertorial content is different from content marketing.

Current research (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019) unambiguously sees digital content marketing (DCM) as a customer-centric alternative to promotional or company-centric marketing communications. However, no studies have offered a systematic DCM conceptualisation outlining the comprehensive activities for implementing its customer-centric principles. Research to date has provided relatively haphazard ideas about certain DCM facets, like technology use and DCM-related organisational procedures (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016) or particular content strategies (Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, DCM has been used narrowly, using the production and distribution of valuable content as the foundation of the idea without considering how businesses learn what information is essential to different decision-makers (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Wall & Spinuzzi, 2018).

This is especially troublesome in difficult-to-manage B2B marketplaces because decision-making processes are multifaceted and involve many buying and usage centre participants (Macdonald et al., 2016; Huber & Kleinaltenkamp, 2020). Second, there is a lack of research examining the contingencies of DCM performance among the reports of the benefits of DCM, such as enhanced customer relationship performance (Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2019), increased sales performance (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016; Wang et al., 2019), and improved brand performance (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). It appears that even contemporary industry white papers assume that the strategic planning of DCM activities is the only factor influencing the performance outcomes of DCM. While the numerous circumstances that strengthen or diminish the performance relationship are equally important, strategic excellence may be a fundamental element of DCM performance.

The situation could be better regarding DCM research in specific industries (namely, distribution trade and agriculture). Publications focusing solely on digital marketing, without expertise in DCM, hold the hegemony (Bose & Kiran, 2021; Shvets et al., 2023). The field of B2B digital content marketing is still in its infancy, and the majority of the knowledge base consists of suggestions from consultants and practitioners.

Therefore, this study aims to conceptualise digital content marketing (DCM) in B2B markets and pinpoint contingencies influencing its performance due to content optimisation.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study used the following methods: dialectical and historical, method of generalisation and grouping, analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, systemic and institutional approaches, and modelling. Logical and intuitive methods and content analysis were used to determine the features, problems, and trends in developing digital content marketing and value co-creation. The study applied elements of a systematic review and grounded theory.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

The content strategies employed by Spotify and Byju, which offer freemium subscriptions for a specific amount of time, engage users through their content and use data to convert them into permanent subscribers, are examples of how content campaigns deliver value to readers and engage material in the best way to increase sales and revenue (Dudhela & Chaurasiya, 2020). With time, this approach boosts sales and helps reach a wider audience. Material helps to nurture the audience by producing leads, offering user-generated material, and centralising the content at every level. B2C companies may convert fleeting users into prospective customers and increase income by nurturing their audience with tailored email marketing, video lessons, recommendations, and guides through informational-based content.

The writers listed above discuss Amazon's new content strategy in 2019. Amazon debuted Amazon Spark, a shopping social network resembling Instagram and Pinterest. Spark, an Amazon app, is made to foster social interaction that will eventually result in product purchases (Bondarenko et al., 2021). This change will make Spark content product-focused and engaging for active consumers. Upon registering, customers are prompted to select themes of interest from a comprehensive menu that encompasses product and lifestyle categories like travel, art and design, and fitness. Following that, users are presented with photographs of goods and other interesting objects in a shoppable news feed, where they may offer suggestions, comment on the items, and click through to purchase. In addition to generating data, Spark provides the business with a fresh set of signals for client targeting, which it can utilise to guide future targeted advertising initiatives (Dudhela & Chaurasiya, 2020).

Lopes and Casais (2022) state that altering the communication process's perspective is essential before launching a content marketing plan. Organisations implement an inbound strategy in which customers voluntarily seek out the brand because it offers them exciting and educational material as a substitute for advertising messaging.

In order to assist businesses who are just beginning their content marketing strategies, Ho et al. (2020) offer a strategic content marketing framework that leads marketers through the strategic parts of content marketing in a vertical fashion as well as the growth and execution paths of content marketing in a horizontal manner. Depending on the company's overall level of maturity in content marketing activities, this model offers the fundamental components of a content marketing strategy (emerging, developing or maturing). This differentiation was based on the kind of content the businesses examined, the quantity of live social media channels, the amount of money they invested in content marketing, the degree to which they abandoned their focus on selling-only content, the amount of instructional content they included in their plan, and whether or not the plan was documented. As a result, it was determined that as businesses advanced in the creation of content, they learned more about content marketing strategies; expanding the variety of content kinds assisted in detracting from the importance of sales-only targeted content and increased educational content; and businesses at the forefront of the process allocated a more significant portion of their budget to content marketing, which resulted in the formulation and documentation of a content strategy. Thus, the model shows how businesses can migrate, optimise, streamline, and accelerate their use of content marketing (second column measurement).

Since customer profiles vary across platforms and different content communities would not benefit from the same content, different platforms require contextualised content. For any material to have the required focus, it needs to have a goal that can be measured. Customers are drawn to and kept interested in stories. Thus, each platform should have a narrative plan and a defined content marketing strategy comprising content pillars catering to the target audience's interests. Content delivery must occur appropriately and be tailored to the intended audience. Quality content creation produces value and engagement rather than just noise. For instance, since LinkedIn is a platform for discussion rather than sales, users there should be viewed as equal partners, and in order to win over potential clients, brands should join the network as another member. The user connection philosophy, which is founded on relational marketing principles and encourages efforts targeted at creating, cultivating, and preserving relationships with users, is addressed by this hunt for trust. In order to determine the demands of users and provide value, it is imperative to focus on their profiles and interests to build these partnerships.

Due to fundamental changes in B2B buying behaviour, vendors consider digital content marketing (DCM) a strategic priority, even though businesses fully need help implementing a customer-centric marketing strategy. In order to close significant knowledge gaps in the corpus of existing research, several studies highlight essential elements impacting the performance outcomes of customer-centric DCM and critical activities for implementing it in B2B marketplaces. Specifically, Terho et al. (2022) consider the activities, results, and contingency plans that emerge during the client journey when analysing digital content marketing in commercial marketplaces.

In order to reap the benefits of DCM, suppliers must embrace a customer-centric strategy that provides each member of the buying unit with exclusive, valuable information (Yaghtin et al., 2022). However, only some B2B companies accomplish this; according to interview research conducted with 172 B2B marketers, only half think their content is unique, and only 23% customise it for specific users (Oord, 2017). Additionally, recent industry research shows that B2B organisations frequently base their content marketing strategies on marketer-centric objectives and measurements (Merlette, 2021). Therefore, B2B companies typically need to realise the full potential of DCM as a customer-centric approach, even when they acknowledge its potential.

Currently, digital marketing activities are less used in the agricultural industry than in other industries. Other industries are characterised by the fact that 88% of companies use digital marketing there, while only 78% – in the agricultural industry (Hermawati et al., 2021). This information shows some lag behind current trends in the agricultural industry. Agricultural representations in digital marketing, YouTube channels, brands, blogs, fan pages, mailings and much more are widely used in various countries' agricultural sectors. Websites have also been created to run agri-marketing campaigns, such as [agmarknet.gov.in](http://agmarknet.gov.in). Such sites make doing business easy and comfortable, conveniently receiving the necessary financial statements, researching the latest trends, and helping develop new strategies (Campos, 2021; Shyshkova et al., 2022; Verbivska et al., 2023).

The agricultural and agribusiness sectors in the U.S. have expanded to encompass a market worth close to \$390 billion in goods and produce. Subsectors such as agricultural machinery, precision agriculture, pesticides, farm equipment, crop production, supply-chain services, and more are now part of the increasingly complex farming and agribusiness industry (Pylypenko et al., 2018).

Nowadays, businesses in these industries can use online marketing strategies or more conventional corporate outreach channels. However, thanks to digital marketing, enterprises in the agribusiness and agriculture sectors may more effectively generate business-to-business leads and boost their visibility (Roieva et al., 2023).

However, the adoption rate of digital marketing is now lowest in the agriculture sector, at 78%, lower than the average of 88% in all other industries (Ozguven, 2023). Digital marketing in the agriculture

sector offers companies and suppliers wishing to expand their reach the chance to enhance organic site traffic, increase search engine ranks, and boost perceived industry authority.

It may appear to companies, agriservice providers, and online merchants in this industry that established KPIs may not transfer as naturally to the world of Internet marketing. However, this is untrue. Search engine optimisation and paid advertising are two aspects of digital marketing for agriculture that firms can use to improve B2B lead growth and the digital marketing of agriculture e-commerce products.

Digital marketing impacts 67% of purchases made by several industrial manufacturers and industrial enterprises in business-to-business sectors such as farming and agriculture (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3: The effectiveness of digital marketing application in agriculture sectors**

Source: (Ozguven, 2023)

A McKinsey report (Fiocco et al., 2022) claims that growers and farmers are changing their purchasing habits, aiming to buy inputs earlier in the year and actively looking for less expensive options to weather market volatility. Due to this change in consumer relations, agribusinesses may need help to reach their audience with previously successful content. However, companies in the agriculture sector may be able to attract and close more new customers if they implement an effective farm content marketing plan.

A thorough grasp of the intended audience is essential for creating agricultural content that generates quality leads. Many agribusiness marketing teams assume they understand the mindsets of decision-makers and buyers. However, consumer personas based exclusively on customer support and sales team input could be more accurate. Few companies can afford to make this error when the economy is struggling (Chychun et al., 2023).

Internal feedback is only one piece of the jigsaw that helps reveal the obstacles, objectives, and motivating factors that influence a decision-maker's purchase decision. Research and data analysis for various decision-makers, enterprises, and verticals are necessary to create agri-business marketing material that performs exceptionally well and adequately understands the client (Chunikhina et al., 2023).

Real-time tracking and analysis of market data and information is made possible by digital marketing for farmers and agricultural suppliers (Shpak et al., 2023). To promote their agricultural products, farmers and agricultural suppliers can also design and oversee successful digital marketing initiatives. The issue of agricultural product marketing, where marketing channels are often lengthy and may harm farmers as producers, can be solved using digital marketing. An important factor in raising the added value of agricultural products is marketing. Agribusiness may greatly benefit from digital innovation in addressing the overstock issue. Furthermore, the sustainability paradigm is used in this instance. Solekan et al. (2024) specifically address digital marketing strategies for farmers' use of agribusiness products, marketing agricultural products via digital platforms, creative agribusiness marketing techniques, and the digitalisation of agribusiness marketing as a means of mitigating agricultural product oversupply from a sustainability standpoint.

The authors assert that an issue shared by many nations worldwide is the overabundance of agricultural products. When agricultural output surpasses current market demand, this happens. As a result, farmers may suffer significant financial losses, and agricultural commodity prices may drop sharply. Technological advancements have made digitalisation inevitable in practically every industry, including agriculture. The digital age has brought about a transformation in the way agribusinesses promote their goods. Agricultural company players have shifted from traditional marketing methods to more effective and efficient digital marketing strategies, including digital content marketing (Solekan et al., 2024). Because digital content marketing helps farmers market their products more successfully, it can significantly help agribusiness overcome oversupply. A more engaging and dynamic manner to promote their products to potential customers can be achieved by leveraging social media, websites, or mobile applications. Raising customer knowledge of the agricultural products produced and strengthening the brand lowers the likelihood of an oversupply and raises demand (Koval et al., 2019; Kovshun et al., 2023; Waluyo, 2024).

To get the desired effect of content marketing, one must know how to handle information correctly. About 95% of marketers divide content into segments, 65% use trends in a specific area, 59% use profiles of decision-makers, 55% use company characteristics, and 43% use stages of the buying cycle (Krowinska et al., 2023).

In addition to segmentation, marketers also face barriers, the most significant of which are lack of time (69%), insufficient content (55%), issues with quality and content stickiness (47%), and lack of allocated budget (39%) (Krowinska et al., 2023).

## **DISCUSSION**

Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson (2013) make an intriguing recent contribution to the information systems literature. They assert that social media and computing have the power to fundamentally alter the online content industry, and they support a strategic approach that places the social experience at the centre of the digital business strategy of content websites. Numerous other authors agree that social media is crucial as a platform for user-generated content creation, and its possible effects on brand reputations, brand communities, and brand co-creation have all been discussed along with this. Quinton (2013). Thus, there is a particular kind of digital content marketing where, in contrast to other categories, the content is created by the company's clients or other website users; this kind of "social content" is crucial for establishing and preserving marketing partnerships between the company and its clients as well as for fostering the exchange and development of client knowledge, especially in B2B settings.

According to Mattos et al. (2021), the content delivered to prospective clients is tailored based on their online activities and profile information, enhancing the value co-creation process. Lassila et al. (2023) investigate how contact supports value co-creation during the pre-purchase customer journey stages. According to their research, communication is essential during the pre-purchasing phases of a customer's journey. Results show how different engagement channels and content help businesses collaborate with potential customers to co-create value. The authors claim that digital advancements have changed B2B client journeys, leading to fewer linear and more circular touchpoint patterns. They also claim that, within digital content marketing, an increasing proportion of consumers are completing online transactions. Business-to-business clients are impacted by the same social networks that affect individual customers (Lassila et al., 2023). Similarly, due to its interactive nature, value co-creation can occur through various digital interactions during the pre-purchase stage of digital content marketing.

Online brand communities play a significant role in developing marketing strategies, as Ozuem and Wills (2022) note in their book "Digital Marketing Strategies for Value Co-creation". However, how marketers can effectively use these platforms to develop and enhance consumer engagement is still

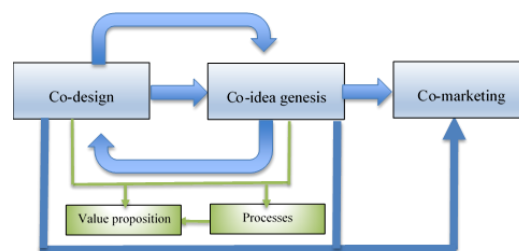
being determined. For an online brand community to be influential, participants must be able to separate themselves from non-community members while feeling a connection to the brand and other members. It should also include traditions and ceremonies that unite individuals around a holy common experience and a moral duty to support the community (Ovsianiuk-Berdadina et al., 2024). In actuality, brands actively support maintaining activity levels in online brand communities by giving members the amount of involvement they want. The writers offer a comprehensive examination of how customers respond when they actively participate in online brand communities, focusing on contemporary issues in digital marketing. Finally, it examines how online brand communities enhance value co-creation and how companies can leverage the various levels of engagement, participation, and online discussions to develop marketing plans.

Value co-creation differs from other applications of open innovation management in that all parties involved usually want to ensure that everyone wins from the partnership (Dineva, 2023). Group creativity may foster mutual success, loyalty, and development through value co-creation (VCC), a critical element of business-to-business relationships (Andersson & Wikström, 2017).

Innovation is no longer the exclusive means of creating value; supply and demand work together to create value. While the latter clarifies their requirements and expectations and contributes their knowledge on meeting them, the former provides the framework and resources for the co-created value. Moreover, supply includes the entire network of players who create and use the innovation, not just the one company that ultimately introduces it to the market.

Value propositions, products, services, or solutions are potential value conveyors in the exchange processes between the organisation and the customer firms. In a business-to-business setting, value is defined as an actor's subjective experience resulting from a co-creation process (Kohtamäki & Rajala, 2016). According to Gandhi et al. (2019), customer experience and expectations are essential, but in B2B transactions, this reasoning is frequently disregarded. For instance, B2B businesses fall short of their business-to-consumer (B2C) counterparts in customer engagement, according to IBM's Institute for Business Value 2019 (Pathak et al., 2022). The literature has identified distinctions between B2B and B2C transactions regarding purchasing behaviour, the purchasing process, purchasing decision-making, and the complexity involved. Above all, B2B purchasing is commonly understood as a cooperative effort involving suppliers and buyers that necessitates co-creation to get mutual benefits from the partnership (Lilien, 2016). Previous studies on value co-creation have concentrated on the business-to-consumer setting; as a result, until recently, VCC in the business-to-consumer setting got less attention (Purchase & Volery, 2020).

In the meantime, the global, digitally connected, service-oriented, and innovative economy has increased the significance of VCC in the B2B setting (Pathak et al., 2020). Co-design, co-idea genesis, and co-marketing are examples of this VCC practice (Frow et al., 2015). Nonetheless, studies also indicate that partners' opportunistic actions could result in value destruction in a B2B setting (Pathak et al., 2020), and this needs to be considered while creating the VCC structure in DCM. The model of VCC for B2B interactions in digital marketing can be schematically depicted as follows (see Figure 4):



**Figure 4: VCC conceptual model for B2B digital marketing**

Source: developed by the authors



VCC is a notion that Rusthollkarhu et al. (2020) propose for the digital ecosystem of B2B sales. While these writers do not specifically address digital content marketing, the concept of an ecosystem perfectly captures the framework for understanding the essence of value co-creation in its context. In addition to blogs and articles, other resources like tests, case studies, and success stories (especially in the context of sustainability) could help promote value co-creation and increase the efficacy of digital content marketing at the same time. With its synergistic instruments, this strategy is particularly significant for industries like agriculture.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that in the increasingly complex landscape of distribution trade and agriculture, coordinated actions are required, and partnership, trust, and constructive interaction of all participants in supply chains are critical, especially for the B2B sector. Coordination of the actions and interests of partners is especially in demand in the context of the increasing complexity of logistics organisational forms and the intellectualisation of supply systems. Moreover, this is where the symbiosis of digital content marketing, value co-creation and ecosystem approach 'comes to the rescue'. Its essence is to form a network of organisations united within a single digital platform, using its services to interact with each other and clients to promote with the help of digital content marketing and co-creating value.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

**L. D.:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Formal analysis, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

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